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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000113

SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ARP AND S/CT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/10/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [KAWC](#) [AF](#) [QA](#)
SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA BOSS OFFERS SUPPORT FOR AMCIT KIDNAP
VICTIM IN AFGHANISTAN

REF: DOHA 105

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH E. LEBARON, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

Note: This cable contains two action requests. Please see Comments Section.

KEY POINTS

-- Al Jazeera Network Director General Wadah Khanfar told Ambassador on February 10 that Al Jazeera was willing to broadcast programs in support of New York Times journalist David Rohde, an Amciti being held captive in Afghanistan.

-- According to Khanfar, broadcasts could include Al Jazeera's own statements in support of Rohde, statements by his family and employer, and a profile of Rohde, which could include mention of his award-winning reporting on the massacre of Muslims in Srebrenica.

-- Khanfar said Al Jazeera does not hand over hostage videos to law enforcement because it does not want to become embroiled in legal proceedings. If provided an option that would absolve Al Jazeera of legal responsibility, however, he was willing to bring it before the Board of Directors for consideration.

-- The Director General apologized for Al Jazeera's breach of its own policy in not notifying Embassy in advance of airing video footage of Rohde on February 6.

COMMENTS AND ACTION REQUESTS

-- Embassy requests that appropriate Department offices consider, in careful consultation with Rohde's family and employers, how to respond to Khanfar's offer of broadcast support. At a minimum, we believe that Al Jazeera's highlighting Rohde's Bosnia reporting would be helpful.

-- Embassy also requests that Department -- L, specifically -- study Al Jazeera's legal concerns about handing over hostage videos. Perhaps L can identify a procedure that meets Al Jazeera's concerns about its exposure to legal processes, if it were to provide these videos to the USG.

-- We frequently disagree with Al Jazeera's reporting style and editorial bent, but it is useful to remember that there are still areas on which Al Jazeera is willing to work with us.

END KEY POINTS, ACTION REQUESTS AND COMMENTS

¶1. (C) Ambassador called on Al Jazeera Director General Wadah Khanfar on February 10 to discuss the network's recent airing of a hostage video involving New York Times reporter David Rohde (reftel) and Al Jazeera's sensational Gaza coverage (septel). Khanfar said he was pleased to cooperate with the Embassy on viewing the hostage video because, "when it involves a journalist, we are not neutral. We will take his side every time."

¶2. (C) Khanfar said that he had told Rohde's editors that, if they or the family wanted to record pleas for Rohde's release, Al Jazeera would air them. "We know that they are watching us in Afghanistan, so this could be helpful," he offered. Khanfar noted that the Times editors had declined, noting that sensitive negotiations were ongoing. If ever it were deemed useful, however, Khanfar said that Al Jazeera would be willing to air its own statements in support of Rohde.

¶3. (C) Khanfar also noted his willingness to produce and air a profile on Rohde's life. Responding to a suggestion from Ambassador, Khanfar agreed that a profile could be powerful if it highlighted Rohde's Pulitzer-prize winning work reporting on the massacre of thousands of Muslims in Srebrenica.

¶4. (C) Khanfar said Al Jazeera does not hand over hostage videos to law enforcement because it does not want to become

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embroiled in legal proceedings. If provided an option that would absolve Al Jazeera of legal responsibility, however, he was willing to bring it before the Board of Directors for consideration.

¶5. (C) Asked if, in the future, Embassy could be made aware of such tapes 24-72 hours in advance, Khanfar replied that this was too much time, since most videos provided to Al Jazeera are uploaded to the Internet within several hours, and said the network strived to notify embassies 3-4 hours before broadcasting. He apologized for Al Jazeera's breach of policy in not notifying the Embassy in advance of the Rohde clip, explaining that the editor on duty at the time had received calls from New York Times reporters and others, so he thought the fact that Al Jazeera had the video was common knowledge.
LeBaron